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# Second 100 Years of Professional Golf in Jacksonville begins with the 2018 Players

By [Garry Smits](#), Florida Times-Union

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In the quiet Ortega neighborhood between Roosevelt Boulevard and the St. Johns River, where stately mansions on the water stand sentry just across the street from middle-class homes, there used to be a golf course.

Remnants of the Florida Country Club are barely evident. A small pond near the intersection of Verona Road and Ortega Boulevard, obscured by massive tangles of Spanish Moss hanging from a huge oak tree, was said to be one of the course's water hazards. Streets have golf-related names, such as Fairway Drive and Country Club Road.

The clubhouse was where Verona and Ortega converge at the river. The club had a skeet-shooting area on the riverbank and the small building used to store the clay targets and trap is still part of a residence.

It was at this Donald Ross course that the first professional tournament on the First Coast recognized by the PGA Tour, the Jacksonville Open, was contested in 1918.

This week, 100 years later, The Players Championship will be held at the Players Stadium Course at TPC Sawgrass. It will be the 97th event sanctioned by a major tour during that span, which includes the PGA Tour, PGA Tour Champions, LPGA and Web.com Tour.

"That's quite an accomplishment," said Tony Parker, the World Golf Hall of Fame historian. "Maybe a dozen cities in the U.S., maybe less, can claim to have had a PGA Tour presence for that long."

## **A century's worth of superstars**

The bulk of those tournaments, 73, have been PGA Tour events. And at one time or another, every professional player of any significance has put a tee in the ground at a First Coast golf course: Sam Snead, Ben Hogan, Byron Nelson, Gene Sarazen, Walter Hagen, Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson ... in all, more than five dozen members of the World Golf Hall of Fame.